

A TRANSLATION BIOPSY OF CORMAC MCCARTHY'S  
*THE SUNSET LIMITED* IN SPANISH:  
SHADOWING THE RE-CREATIVE PROCESS

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*[S]ólo cabe lograrlo [libertar a los hombres de la distancia impuesta por las lenguas] en medida aproximada.<sup>1</sup>*

José Ortega y Gasset in 'Misericordia y esplendor de la traducción' (438-439)

*You can acclimate yourself to loss. You have to.*  
Cormac McCarthy in *The Sunset Limited* (130)

*It's the price you have to pay for not reading the book as it was written.*  
*'An Interview with Luis Murillo Fort' (9)*

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## Resumen

Los análisis anteriores de las traducciones de la narrativa de Cormac McCarthy al castellano de Luis Murillo Fort se hicieron con el propósito de crear, por medio de autopsias de traducción, un mapa retrospectivo de los métodos del traductor. En el presente caso, sin embargo, el traductor español ha permitido un seguimiento de su trabajo mientras se realizaba, más semejante a hacerle una biopsia en la que las muestras de las versiones tempranas y posteriores, aún vivientes en ese momento, se examinaron con la ayuda de comentarios encadenados por parte del traductor. El presente artículo hace uso de la metodología del seguimiento [*shadowing*] como una herramienta única e íntima para explorar retos ilustrativos de cómo traducir. El propósito es comprender mejor los procesos mentales y las soluciones de un traductor consumado mientras se halla en el acto mismo de traducir una obra literaria de géneros mezclados, escrita por un icono de las letras norteamericanas.

**Palabras clave:** Traducción literaria, proceso de traducción, biopsia de traducción, autopsia de traducción, crítica de traducción literaria, seguimiento [*shadowing*], dialecto, Cormac McCarthy, Luis Murillo Fort.

UNA BIOPSIA DE LA TRADUCCIÓN DE *THE SUNSET LIMITED* DE CORMAC MCCARTHY: SIGUIENDO LA PISTA DEL PROCESO RE-CREATIVO

## Abstract

Previous analyses of Luis Murillo Fort's translations of Cormac McCarthy's fiction into Spanish sought to map the translator's methods in retrospect, after the fact, via translation autopsies. In this instance, however, the Spanish translator allowed a shadowing of his work in progress, more similar to performing a biopsy in which at-the-time living samples of early- to late-stage drafts were examined with threaded commentary from the translator. This article uses the shadowing methodology as a unique and intimate diagnostic tool for exploring illustrative translation challenges. The purpose is to provide insights into an accomplished translator's thought processes and solutions while in the very moment of translating a challenging genre-blended work of fiction by an American literary icon.

**Keywords:** Literary translation, translation process, translation biopsy, translation autopsy, literary translation criticism, shadowing, dialect, Cormac McCarthy, Luis Murillo Fort.

## 0. Introduction: from Autopsy to Biopsy

Previous analyses of Luis Murillo Fort's translations of Cormac McCarthy's fiction into Spanish<sup>2</sup> sought to map the translator's methods<sup>3</sup> in retrospect, after the fact, via translation autopsies. In this instance, however, the Spanish translator allowed a shadowing of his work in progress, more similar to performing a biopsy in which at-the-time living samples of early- to late-stage drafts were examined with threaded commentary from the translator, via email, marginal notes and responses to queries in his manuscript. The communications exchanged constitute the biopsy's living tissue samples. This article uses the bioptic shadowing methodology as a unique and intimate diagnostic tool for exploring illustrative translation challenges: moving the title from English into Spanish; dealing with untranslatable diction and dialect (a group consideration: translator + shadower queries and comments + corrector + editor); striving to preserve the protagonists' voices and tones in a "novel in dramatic form"; conveying the agreement and skeptical irony of "Mm hm" and "Mm" interjections; and recasting slang, "chippied," "honey," "ball park," "busted out," "the dozens," "third railers," and "trick bag." The purpose is to provide insights into an accomplished translator's thought processes and solutions while in the very moment of translating a challenging genre-blended work of fiction by a literary icon<sup>4</sup>. It maps Murillo Fort's process of creating difference in sameness and sameness in difference.

## 1. Methodology: Shadowing the Translator

In her groundbreaking book *The Subversive Scribe: Translating Latin American Fiction* (1991), an autobiographical consideration of her work as a literary translator and co- or re-creator, renowned translator Suzanne Jill Levine explored *her own* scholarly, creative and collaborative translation processes. Another example of using the autobiographical mode to explain in depth how translation works—in this case, a meshing of “the functions of critic and translator”—is John Felstiner’s pioneering *Translating Neruda: The Way to Macchu Picchu* (1980:3). In both books, leading American translators exploit the authority and authenticity, characterized by immediacy, of the autobiographical mode: *I was there, this is what I did, and this is how*. In the case of Spanish translator Luis Murillo Fort’s work on McCarthy’s *The Sunset Limited*, however, the unusual critical methodology of shadowing the translation process as it is actually occurring does not issue from the translator’s own exclusive looking at, back, and into; rather, it comes from the translator’s authorization of another to witness and chronicle the ongoing process from an immediate vantage point. This temporal immediacy and proximity instead take the form of: *I (the other, the translation critic) was also there (electronically), this is what I followed the translator doing, and this is how I saw and understood it being done*. It too facilitates literary translation criticism that hermeneutically comes more from inside and during, a biopsy, rather than outside and after, an autopsy. The methodological perspective of such shadowing, while never as intimate as that of a translator’s autobiographical reflections, is not as removed as the typical work of critical scholarship that descriptively or hermeneutically performs a postmortem on a translation product. It occupies a ground between yet *very* close to the translator *per se* at work—as close as one can get without actually being the translator—, and via prompts involves the translator in verbalizing and teasing out various aspects of the translation process.

Such shadowing is an unusually synchronous vantage point, privileged.<sup>5</sup> It came about unexpectedly when I received the following invitation from translator Luis Murillo Fort: “In a few days, I’ll be putting an end to the first stage in my translation of *The Sunset Limited*. I wonder if you would able to have a look at it, or perhaps peruse it, so you can give your opinion” (8/12/11 email). Initially, he was concerned about how to render the diction of one of the protagonists: “Mostly I need your opinion about Black’s speech. But of course I’ll be glad to hear any suggestion you may offer” (8/15/11email). As we warmed to the task at hand—“I knew you would like to pour over CM’s [Cormac McCarthy’s] text. Please have a look at my remarks to your remarks. I’ll be happy to learn what you think about them. I’ll need some further help with this ghost sentence on page 14. I’m at a loss there” (Murillo Fort 8/28/11 email)—, I sought to convey my awareness that I should proceed with tact as I traversed new and potentially delicate terrain which, if not done with full care, could undermine a professional friendship: “Please take any of my comments and queries with a grain of salt. They are honest and are meant constructively. Some may be of use to you, even if only helping you to confirm your translation decisions”

(8/27/11 email). Murillo Fort was in fact appreciative that, in my earlier articles about his translations of McCarthy, “[you] didn’t avoid telling me what I could have done better” (8/31/11 email)<sup>6</sup>.

I confided to him that “I have never been so close to the real process while it is actually in progress, and I think some interesting insights are emerging that may be of interest to translators, professors, students of translation, readers of CM, etc.” (8/29/11 email). Murillo Fort had already framed the shadowing methodology as follows: “I wonder if you feel like you are actually peering through my window from the outside, a witness to a translation work in progress?” (8/22/11 email). I replied that “Not every day do I get to read such a translation in progress. Probably not every day that you get this kind of feedback while working” (Doyle 8/27/11 email). He concurred: “[I]t’s been a whole new experience for me” (8/29/11 email). In the end, a shadower such as I was about to become is just one more interested voice, redoubling that of the translator, continually probing: “Is this the best possible rendition?”

## **2. Genre, Plot, Possible Translation Interference from “outer images and/or sounds,” and Audience**

A protracted philosophical dialogue between two protagonists, Black and White, *The Sunset Limited: a Novel in Dramatic Form* is, despite what the subtitle claims, much more drama than novel. Its “World Premiere... was presented in May 2006 by Steppenwolf Theater Company of Chicago” (<http://www.hbo.com/movies/sunset-limited/index.html>). Enacted “in a room in a tenement building in a black ghetto in New York City,” the play is as bleak and foreboding as other better known works by McCarthy such as *Blood Meridian*, *No Country for Old Men*, and *The Road*. The book opens in mid conversation with Black, “a large black man” (McCarthy 2006: 3)—a street-smart, numbers-wise ex-con and ex-addict—talking to White, “a middle-aged white man,” a professor, and a “terminal commuter” (pp. 3, 85). White’s attempted suicide on the day of his nothing-special-about-it birthday (p.6), his “amazin leap” (p.22) from the platform in front of the oncoming Sunset Limited train, has been frustrated by Black. The dialogue, or mutual interrogation (p.89) between Black and White, which is also each one’s self-interrogation about values and beliefs, is a contest between having and having lost hope and faith, and between doubters and questioners, defined by Black in the following manner: “the questioner [Black] wants the truth. The doubter wants to be told there aint no such thing” (p.67). Black and White, as their names suggest, represent two distinct views, evenly and stubbornly matched: “You a hard case, Professor,” says Black, to which White responds, “You’re not exactly a day at the beach yourself” (p.59). Black’s charge (“you [Jesus] wanted me to help him,” p.142) has been to convince White “to get in the right line. Buy the right ticket. Take that regular commuter train and stay off the express. Stay on the platform with your fellow commuter” (p.133). White, who “loathe[s] these discussions” (p. 137), *coldly*

(per the parenthetical cue provided by McCarthy, p.137) informs Black, who has found rehabilitation and endurance in Jesus and the Bible, that "I don't believe in God. Can you understand that? Look around you man. Can't you see? The clamor and din of those in torment has to be the sound most pleasing to his ear" (p.137). Determined to follow through on what he has set out to do, White informs Black that "The one thing I won't give up is giving up" (p.130).

To initiate my shadowing, I wondered if, either before or during his work on the translation, Murillo Fort had seen the HBO movie of *The Sunset Limited* (released in 2011), starring Tommy Lee Jones and Samuel L. Jackson:

In many ways, I suspect, it is probably better not to see or HEAR anything (any hair style, any voice a-la-Chigurh<sup>7</sup>) before doing your own work, so as to avoid any peripheral contamination or distraction from what you yourself see and hear as the translator. Would it have helped or hurt to have seen the movie of *No Country [for Old Men]* or the HBO movie of *The Sunset Limited* before doing your translations? Would it bring you closer to, or push you a bit farther away from, CM himself and the voices in the literary work? (8/15/11 email)

Murillo Fort responded that "I'd rather pour over the words and let them generate their own images and 'sounds' inside my head while I'm working at it. Outer images and/or sounds would probably interfere. But I really don't know" (8/15/11 email). In effect, neither of us had seen the movie version, described in the *HBO Films: the Sunset Limited* website as "a two-character drama that examines the relationship between strangers who are brought together by desperate circumstances." A movie trailer at the website further clarifies that, in terms of literary genre, the movie is "based on the *play* by Cormac McCarthy" (<http://www.hbo.com/movies/sunset-limited/index.html>, emphasis added).

Since *The Sunset Limited* is classified by McCarthy as two genres, I was curious as to whether Murillo Fort had translated it "as a novel or as a play... Since it is all dialogue, did you translate for the stage and cinema actors so that they could actually say the words? Did you translate more for reading (like a regular novel) or for performance?" (8/31/11 email). In earlier conversations, Murillo Fort had explained that he follows McCarthy's lead when translating him: "[I] give myself over to what is in the text" (2007b: 6) and "I act in accordance with what I receive, or believe I receive, from the author" (2010: 182)<sup>8</sup>. Like McCarthy, he defers this particular issue of genre and audience to the discretion of both reader and spectator/viewer: "I just tried to make the characters speak as similar as possible to what they say in the original text. Two men in NYC [New York City] will never 'sound' like two men in, say, Barcelona. It can't be done. In other words, I mostly paid attention to what they said. How did *you* hear it?" (8/31/11 email).

### 3. Translating the Title

The challenge of translation, and how the endeavor is fraught with second-guessing —the proposing and testing of possible solutions through trial and error: writing, ~~revision~~, rewriting, ~~revision~~, rewriting... —, begins with the title itself, *The Sunset Limited: a Novel in Dramatic Form*. In an email, Murillo Fort, whose draft manuscript at the time was titled *El Sunset Limited*, informed me that he was “still in doubt about including a footnote explaining what ‘taking the Sunset Limited’ means. I’d rather not. I might have to change the novel’s title” (8/22/11). As our cross-threaded emails show, the possibilities here are complex<sup>9</sup>, running from semantics, geography, and cultural allusion to the sight and sound of the foreign (un-translated) words in English preceded by the simple definite article “el” [the] in Spanish:

Doyle 8/22/11 email: I’m not sure about the footnote. What would you say in it?

Murillo Fort 8/26/11 email: I don’t expect the average Spanish reader to know what taking the Sunset Limited means. A Google search for those who might care to do it would probably add to the confusion—no Sunset Limited running under NYC. So I wonder whether I should insert some words of my own into the main text.

Doyle 9/1/11 email: I’ve been thinking about your thoughts regarding the title. I think readers [in Spanish] will be able to piece together what it means if you leave it [the name of the train] in English. But you can always consider an interpolation of sorts when the Sunset Limited is first mentioned in the text, perhaps something along the lines of ‘el Sunset Limited, el tren/el AVE especial para pasajeros selectos’ [the high-speed Spanish train Alta Velocidad Española] then not mention this again. Your brief explication would be in your first translation, which means that you could leave the title in English and just keep Sunset Limited for the rest of the time. For me, The Sunset Limited, as far as the name of a train or train line, sounds like ‘The Sunset Special,’ a special train (an AVE or Talgo<sup>10</sup> for the ages) for special (suicidal) passengers.

Murillo Fort 9/1/11 email: As it is, I added a ‘famoso’ before the first Sunset Limited in my last draft. It’s just a very smooth way to give it an uncompromising mythical quality.

Murillo Fort 9/2/11 email: I’m not satisfied with ‘*El Sunset Limited*.’ I wasn’t since day one. The article [“El”] is so weak close to that ‘train.’ (...) *Un billete para* [a ticket for] *el Sunset Limited* might work as a title, if only I could interpolate the word ‘billete’ the first or second time the SL [source language] appears. I can’t use the AVE. Too local. Would read like a very big interference, I think [and would also undermine the insertion of the mythical ‘famoso’ above: Doyle observation].

Doyle 9/2/11 email: I don’t really mind ‘*El Sunset Limited*.’ It is as succinct as CM’s title, and the reader will find out the rest as he/she reads on. ‘Un billete...’ might work well also, although I don’t recall any allusions by CM to a ‘ticket,’ so that would insert

something new and different. Although one assumes that a ticket of sorts is needed for this train... Or perhaps 'Un pasajero en el SL' [A Passenger on/Aboard the Sunset Limited] or 'El ultimo pasajero del SL' [The Last Rider on/Aboard the Sunset Limited]? (...) Maybe there is a line you can take from White or Black as a subtitle? '*El Sunset Limited: XXX*'? You will find the right title and know it when you see it.

The title possibilities bandied about were: *EL SUNSET LIMITED* (*Novela con estructura teatral*) (Murillo Fort, as it actually appeared in his 8/29/11 draft manuscript); *Un billete para el Sunset Limited* (Murillo Fort); *Un pasajero en el Sunset Limited* (Doyle suggestion); and *El último pasajero del Sunset Limited* (Doyle suggestion). It is interesting that Murillo Fort did not consider the possibility of a full literal translation into Spanish, along the lines of "El Atardecer/Ocaso Limitado." Yet by convention one does not tend to translate a proper name such as The Southern Crescent (an overnight long-haul passenger train in the United States that runs from Washington to the Crescent City, New Orleans<sup>11</sup>) or Agatha Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (*Asesinato en el Orient Express*). At the time of this writing, Murillo Fort and the publisher had not resolved the issue of the title in translation.

#### 4. Hermeneutic Hearing and Jazz Guitar, Translating Stylistic Signatures and Idio-dialect, Compensation, and Difference in Sameness/Sameness in Difference

An aspect of the hermeneutics of translation is that the process reflects back-and-forth layers of communication, both visual and aural, that take place initially between two languages, in this case the English source language and the Spanish target language, and then within this general conversation the very specific one that takes place simultaneously between source language author Cormac McCarthy's original writing in American English and translator Luis Murillo Fort's response or follow-up writing in Peninsular Spanish, more precisely, the Spanish he uses in urban Barcelona<sup>12</sup>. Required are a translator's keenly developed observation and listening skills, the latter of which, at the highest levels of the art, demonstrate a kind of perfect-pitch ability to detect and reproduce aspects of diction, dialect, tone, and nuance, as well as measure and silence. The translator responses require the target language text (TLT) writing to compete aurally—to demonstrate an ear for what is written—with that of the SLT. Murillo Fort benefits as a translator<sup>13</sup> from the fact that he is an accomplished jazz guitarist who hears the sounds and silences of measures, beats, emphases, and rhythms; major, minor, muted, augmented and diminished chords; sharps, flats, and bent notes; fifths, sevenths, and ninths, etc. He is able to apply this finely attuned listening ability to the acoustic modalities of language, and to McCarthy's writing in particular<sup>14</sup>, which I acknowledged in an 8/29/11 email: "I am amazed at your 'ear' and 'eye' for Spanish, your ability to improvise and riff within the CM key, to 'hear' and 'echo' CM in Spanish, or have him play his tune, so to speak, through your Spanish."

Several of McCarthy's stylistic signatures manifest themselves from the opening exchange between Black and White:

- Black     So what am I supposed to do with you, Professor?  
 White    Why are you supposed to do anything?  
 Black     I done told you. This aint none of my doing. I left out of here this morning  
             to go to work you wasnt no part of my plans at all. But here you is.  
 White    It doesnt mean anything. Everything that happens doesn't mean something else.  
 Black     Mm hm. It dont.  
 White    No. It doesnt. (pp. 3-4)

Here we see how McCarthy typically eschews ornamental use of the apostrophe for certain contractions (aint, wasnt, doesnt, dont), which he will do throughout except when warranted for functional subject-verb grammatical purposes (e.g., you're, he's, what's, it's, there's). The signature omission of the apostrophe (*dont*) does not *per se* contribute to the creation of Black's dialect, as it is noticeably absent also from White's more grammatically standard, professorial diction (*doesnt*). At the same time, McCarthy is already beginning to give voice to Black's distinctive idiolect (his unique diction or personal way of saying things, an individual peculiarity<sup>15</sup>) and dialect (a community, shared peculiarity of diction). In order to show how this occurs, our heuristic method is to intralingually back-translate, to re-English or other-English, the original wording in *The Sunset Limited* from McCarthy's stylized American English (X<sup>1</sup> or Y) into a baseline, straightforward form of expression, a flat communicative diction (X). This baseline X is then used as a springboard for seeing how McCarthy transforms (intralingually stylizes = intralingually translates) this content when writing, which yokes creative writing to the act of translation. Murillo Fort then takes what McCarthy has written, X<sup>1</sup> or Y, and interlingually Spanishes it, turning it into X<sup>2</sup> or Z. In this interlingual transformation, the translator washes his rendition through two complementary stages, although these may not be formalized in separate drafts: the first, which more often may be only mental, is to ensure baseline meaning, to make sure the content is not traduced; the second, for manner and style, is to retain and convey *how* the message is being expressed, a much more ambitious undertaking. A general mapping of the process is provided in Figure 1.

The movement from source to target language texts is a transformative process of creating difference (X, Y, Z) in sameness while maintaining sameness (X, X<sup>1</sup>, X<sup>2</sup>) in difference, as illustrated below:

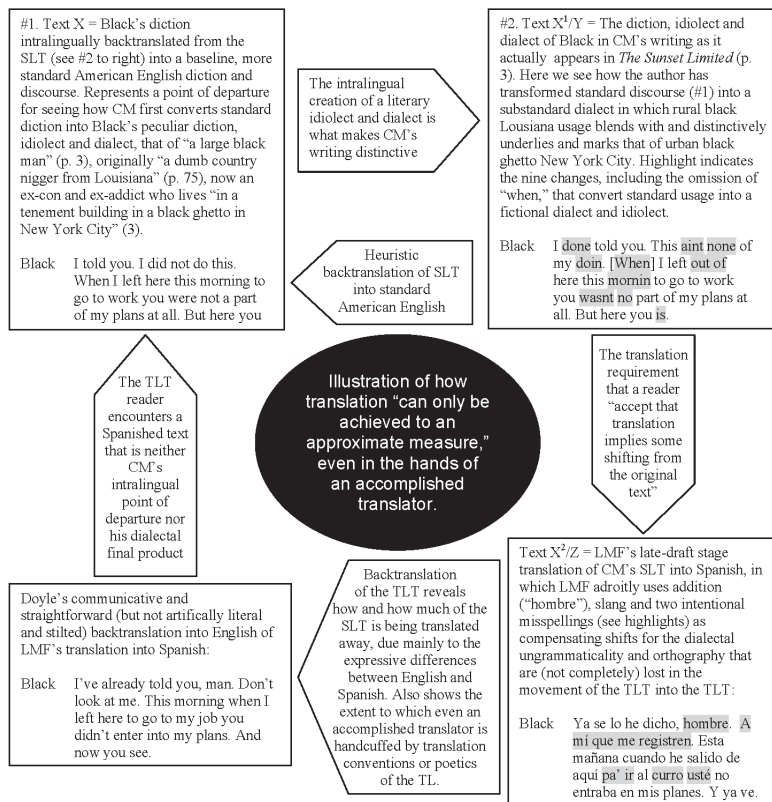
- X:        I told you. I did not do this. (Baseline text in American English)  
 Y/X<sup>1</sup>:   I done told you. This aint none of my doin. (McCarthy text)  
 Z/X<sup>2</sup>:   Ya se lo he dicho, hombre. A mí que me registren. (Murillo Fort text)  
             [I've already told you, man. Don't look at me.] (Doyle back-translation, BT)

One immediately sees how Murillo Fort's translation, Z/X<sup>2</sup>, while impossible (except by creative accident) to retrace through its BT into McCarthy's exact wording,



Y/X<sup>1</sup>, is also at an appropriate remove from an unacceptable, flat baseline expression, which means that it hews closer to McCarthy's style and manner than would be the case with any simply communicative, content-accurate translation. The rendition in Spanish nuances the verb tense, changing the simple preterit of "I *told* you" (*dije*) to the more idiomatic present perfect "I've already *told* you" (*Ya se lo he dicho*), whose source language form and tone of idio-dialectal informality ("done told") can at least be intuited through the addition of the words "already" (*ya*) and "man" (*hombre*). Beyond their commendable intent, such creative stylistic compensations work well enough, which is all one can ask. Similarly, "A mí que me registren" (literally idiomatic for "Search me" or "Let them frisk me" but informal in Spain for "Don't look at/blame me") for McCarthy's (Black's) "This aint none of my doin'," is also a felicitous idiomatic compensation that rescues the source language text from being reduced to an insipid and non-McCarthy "I did not do this." The message remains the same, which it must always, while Murillo Fort substitutes a convincing enough manner and style in Spanish, also a must for higher level translation.

Figure 1. A mapping of Cormac McCarthy's (CM) American English Source Language Text (SLT) into Luis Murillo Fort's (LMF) Spanish Target Language Text (TLT)



In the next segment, the transformative process into Murillo Fort's interlingual Z/X<sup>2</sup> relies on idiomatic compensations as well as two intentional misspellings that place his rendition in closer proximity to McCarthy's Y/X<sup>1</sup> than to an inadequate baseline X expression. Again, it is a given that Z/X<sup>2</sup> cannot be back-translated exactly into Y/X<sup>1</sup> and that there is no possible equivalent in Spanish to Black's American English idio-dialect.<sup>16</sup> But Murillo Fort's adroit (1) shift from the source language text preterit to the more idiomatic present perfect in Spanish, (2) lexical choice of "curro" (informal for "work" or "job"), (3) insertion of an apostrophe (*pa'* for *para*, using a sign that does not exist in conventional Spanish), and (4) provisional apocope of the final "d" of the word "usté" (properly *usted*, although such use of the accented final "e" is a literary convention), are successful compensation considerations that, like adding a subtle yet distinctive seventh or sustained overtone to a musical chord, help the reader in Spanish at least infer some of McCarthy's peculiar verbal ring and feel:

X: When I left here this morning to go to work you were not a part of my plans at all.

(Baseline text in American English)

Y/X<sup>1</sup>: I left out of here this mornin to go to work you wasnt no part of my plans at all. (McCarthy text)

Z/X<sup>2</sup>: Esta mañana cuando he salido de aquí pa' ir al curro usté no entraba en mis planes. (Murillo Fort text)

[This morning when I left here to go to my job you didn't enter into my plans.]  
(Doyle BT)

A translation by definition is different (X to Y) but also the same (X to X<sup>1</sup>), the same but different (X to X<sup>1</sup> to Y). What distinguishes higher-level literary translation, however, and which applies to any other form of creative writing as well, is the form and manner by which content is expressed—*how* the *what* is conveyed. In other words, the *telling* of the story as opposed to the story being told. Distinctive verbal form, style, manner, balance, texture and tone are what make McCarthy *McCarthy*. These are the very signature characteristics that the translator must strive especially not to ignore or translate away. Ungrammaticalities and misspellings in American English in the diction of Black do not exist as parallel, idiomatic ungrammaticalities and misspellings in Spanish. Substandard dialect in Peninsular Spanish does not make the same kind of lexical, orthographic, and grammatical mistakes as in American English. It could be forced by Murillo Fort to make the same mistakes, but doing so would falsify the Spanish language too much, which runs counter to Spain's (or a major publisher's) prevailing poetics of literary translation.

From the very beginning of *The Sunset Limited*, the issues of idio-dialect and diction are foregrounded as a translation challenge<sup>17</sup>. Black's manner of speaking—the

distinctive markers of *his* substandard idio-dialect—is sharply contrasted with the properness of White's speech. Black's dialect is a blend of rural deep-South and urban East-Coast inner city, the latter layered over the remnants of the Louisiana deep structures of his formative years. It has several distinct influences which the attentive reader of American English can detect, but which are impossible to carry over authentically into another language and culture. The reader in English is immediately struck by Black's dialectal diction: he sees and hears it in the writing. In a flattened translation, however, the reader in Spanish *might* only infer this. Qualitatively, these are very different reading experiences. Curious about how Murillo Fort might approach these issues, I asked "Did you imagine a 'black' Barcelona accent that you wanted or 'heard' as being 'right' for Black? Perhaps from American blacks whom you have known in Spain? He is so very different from the black characters of east Tennessee in *Suttree*"<sup>18</sup> (Doyle 8/31/11 email). His response:

I thought about that but eventually ruled it out. It kind of put some unwanted 'chinitas' [pebbles] in my shoe, so to say. I chose to 'invent' a way to confer at least part of the peculiar features of Black's speech, then see and hear if that did the job for me. I'm not overly pleased with the results. It was a matter of taking risks and I took quite a few. Let's wait and see what the readers [correctors and editors] have to say. (8/31/11 email)

I continued with, "Did Black's voice in the original eventually take on his own voice in your translation? If so, how? How did you 'hear' it taking shape?" (Doyle 8/31/11 email). Murillo Fort's answer, reflective of the fact that he was indeed taking more risks to retain more of McCarthy's distinctiveness in his translation, was:

Yes and then no. I needed to believe it myself, and I think I do now. It has some strangeness that I like. We already discussed how a translation always has to retain some strangeness, a flavor of the (alien) original text<sup>19</sup>. I only hope 'my' Black doesn't sound too weird. (8/31/11 email).

Nonetheless, the reader of Black's idio-dialect in Spanish encounters, by definition and the nature of the translation business, a transformed text in which distinctiveness is often pressed into conventionality in Spanish. Such domestication or naturalization is often the result of a group effort that involves the manuscript as first prepared by the translator, who may have been quite bold in his initial risk-taking, and the subsequent modifications imposed by others involved in the project. In the end, the translation into Spanish is not as simple as translator Murillo Fort moving McCarthy's creation of an idio-dialect into Murillo Fort's re-creation of it. Rather, it is a recasting of McCarthy by multiple re-writers in Spanish, not the least of which are the gatekeepers—the "correctores" [editors] and publishers—who ultimately determine whether or not, and in what form, a book appears in print. The result is that stylistic signatures of the source language text are often forced to capitulate to the prevailing translation conventions of the target language or the publishing house. Domestication

characterizes much of literary translation in Spain at this time: a good translation does not read like a translation, it is a Spanish text, not one that may be foreignized *qua* English embedded in the Spanish rendition or in the Spanish text as influenced by McCarthy's English. The difference is that of translating a passage heart and soul into another language, prioritizing the SLT language and culture, versus translating it into the heart and soul of another language, emphasizing the TLT language and culture. A litmus test of the prevailing poetics of literary translation at work on this edition of *The Sunset Limited* in Spanish translation is that it should appear to be as if it had originally been written in Spanish. Yet, ironically, had McCarthy himself actually been writing originally in Spanish, one cannot help but imagine that he would have been permitted to retain his signature stylistic creativity and uniqueness, and that he would have been celebrated for flaunting prevailing conventions. Such is not the case for the translator in this instance, subject to a double standard in terms of authorial license. One must imagine McCarthy's writing as a nail that sticks out from the conventions of writing in American English. We stub our eyes when reading him. In the broadly prevailing poetics of literary translation in Spain, this nail gets hammered down. The walkway of reading is straightened and smoothed, as the current general poetics seems to brook minimal deviation from convention.

The fact that dialect eludes translation is often no fault of the translator, whether it is due to the insurmountable differences between languages and cultures, reflective of Ortega's observation that "each language is a different equation of statements and silences" (1992: 104)<sup>20</sup>, or to a national or publisher's poetics regarding what constitutes an acceptable product of literary translation<sup>21</sup>. Murillo Fort invariably hears and recreates fitting idiomatic dynamic equivalents in Spanish; we applaud this among his considerable fortes as a translator. But *idiomatic* does not equal dialectal. Dialect epitomizes localized diction, often substandard, and in matters of literary translation poses such problems that in the end, regardless of methods or solutions attempted, it thwarts translation. There is no comfort zone, no methodological place of refuge, to be found in the untranslatability of dialect. When confronting dialect, the translator is damned if he does and damned if he doesn't. Yet, the translator's struggles to compensate successfully are always consequential. As Murillo Fort has said, "my main purpose is to achieve something that 'sounds' like Cormac McCarthy... I simply try to do my best" (2010: 6). In the end, one cannot help but wonder whether the best way to deal with dialect might be a poetics that would have it rendered literally or quasi-literally, to let dialect try to speak for itself as much as tolerable<sup>22</sup>. This at least would not falsify the SLT or culture, or translate it away into an also falsified target language culture that it is not and never can be. Yet such an extreme stand on principle might well mean not having modern dialectal masterpieces such as McCarthy's *The Sunset Limited*, *Blood Meridian* or *Suttree* available in Spanish, flawed by loss *qua* change as they cannot help but be as translations.

### 5. Translating the “No Vocals” Sounds of “Mm hm” and “Mm” Interjections: Agreement, Skepticism, Irony

In his conversation with White, Black's interjections run a semantic gamut, ranging from full to partial agreement and skeptical irony. In the opening pages of the play, Black responds to White with the interjection “Mm hm”:

- Black I done told you. This aint none of my doing. I left out of here this morning to go to work you wasnt no part of my plans at all. But here you is.
- White It doesnt mean anything. Everything that happens doesn't mean something else.
- Black Mm hm. It dont.
- White No. It doesnt.
- Black What's it mean then?
- White It doesnt mean anything. You run into people and maybe some of them are in trouble or whatever but it doesnt mean that you're responsible for them.
- Black Mm hm. (pp. 3-4)

In the first instance, Black may well be expressing simple agreement with White's observation, in which case “Mm hm” can be translated intralingually into “Uh-huh,” “Correct” or “I agree,” which interlingually in Peninsular Spanish might be “Sí,” “De acuerdo” or “Vale.” Yet he may also be expressing hesitation, as in “Okay, if you say so,” or “I see” as in “That may or may not be the case,” which might be interlingually considered as “Bueno, si usted lo dice” or “Ya veo” as in “Podría ser.” Following upon his first “Mm hm,” Black's “It dont” can be taken as either statement or query, the latter especially in light of his direct question “What's it mean then?” In the second example, the skeptical irony is more clearly present, which beyond a simple vocalization of agreement can also be read or said as “I see” as in “Let me think about it some more,” “I'm not so sure about that,” or “Yes but no, because I may now indeed be responsible for you,” which adds to the Spanish the possibility of something along the lines of “Ya veo,” “Lo tengo que pensar más,” “No lo sé,” “No me convence,” or “Sí pero no.” In his 8/29/11 draft, Murillo Fort translates it as “Mm-mm. No, ¿eh?” in which the compensation addition of “No, ¿eh?” [don't you think?, you don't say!] fully recharges the “Mm-mm” interjection, spelled now in Spanish, “Mm-mm” versus the English “Mm hm,” with the original ironic doubt.

In another example, White has invoked an imaginary character for the sake of argumentation:

- White It's a matter of agreement. If you and I say that I have my coat on and Cecil says that I'm naked and I have green skin and a tail then we might want to think about where we should put Cecil so that he wont hurt himself.
- Black Who's Cecil?

- White He's not anybody. He's just a hypothetical... There's not any Cecil. He's just a person I made up to illustrate a point.
- Black Made up.
- White Yes.
- Black Mm. (p. 11)

Here Black's interjection is again rich with meaning, along the intralingual lines of "Okay," "I think I see," "If you say so," "I have my doubts," "Where are we going here?" or "You're crazy, man," which Murillo Fort renders in his draft as "Mm-mm," appending the second "mm" to the interjection in Spanish. The name, Cecil, of course, has added its own translation challenge in terms of whether to render it culturally true to the American SLT, thereby foreignizing the Spanish translation, or to culturally re-localize and domesticate it for the new TLT readership in Spanish. After his early consideration of "Dennis" for Cecil, which would have yielded a nice alliteration of "d's," "n's," and "e," "i," "o," and "u" sounds in Spanish—"Dennis dice que yo estoy desnudo" (p. 8 of 8/29/11 draft)—Murillo Fort opts for non translation as the best translation. In a brief exchange, I wondered if the Spanish reader would mentally pronounce the name **Ce**-cil correctly, with the stress on the first syllable, since the stress in Spanish would automatically shift to the last syllable **Ce**-**cil** unless the initial "e" were accented (conventionalized or domesticated) as "**Cé**-cil" (8/29/11). In his marginal response, Murillo Fort chose to foreignize, indicating his expectation that "an educated reader will probably read it [Cecil] as '**Sé**-sil' (Spanish spelling)."

In another exchange, Black's "Mm" and "Mm hm" interjections once again provide a spectrum of semantic possibilities:

- Black That's about all you got in the way of friends.
- White Yes.
- Black Mm. Well. If that's the best friend you got then I reckon that's your bestfriend. Aint it?
- White I don't know.
- Black What did you do to him.
- White What did I do to him?
- Black Yeah.
- White I didnt do anything to him.
- Black Mm hm. (pp. 28-29)

The first interjection, "Mm," may be interpreted as "Okay," "I see," "That's too bad," or "This is food for thought." The second one, "Mm hm," on the other hand, exudes skeptical irony and can range from "I see" to "I understand," "I don't believe you," or "Who do you think you're fooling?" Murillo Fort translates these interjections in his 8/29/11 draft as, respectively, "Mm-mm" and "Mm-mm. Ya." The addition of the "ya" in the second one works very well to retain the loaded irony of the idiomatic

double positive “Yeah, okay” or “Yeah, right,” in which the “ya” (“okay” or “right”) undermines the initial surface affirmation of “Yeah.”

When I queried Murillo Fort in a marginal note to his translation draft about the semantics of Black's loaded interjections in *The Sunset Limited*, he responded that:

In Spanish we would say ‘Ya, ya’ [of course; sure; sure thing; right; yeah, right], which has an assertive tone but also involves some irony, or even something like ‘I say yes but it might be that I’m not believing you.’ Now, White is doubtful about Black’s ‘mm’s.’ I want to preserve that. I thought about spelling it ‘Mm-mm,’ and maybe I’ll do that. This way the Spanish reader would probably emphasize the second ‘mm,’ giving it the ambiguity I believe it has in Black’s speech. (8/29/11)

In an earlier note, I had ventured that “I still like your ‘Ya, ya’ possibility” (8/21/11 email). In the end, Murillo Fort authoritatively brought the matter to closure with the following justification: “But I still like the no-vocals sound. ‘Ya, ya’ can be read many different ways. Should the reader choose the wrong one, he might [erroneously] take Black for an asshole.” The best translation of these interjections into Spanish, then, is essentially a non translation, to retain literally the same “no vocals sound” that achieves a similar evocative semantic effect in both languages. It is a case where the translation strategies of foreignization and domestication fold into one another and function as one and the same thing, each simultaneously at work in the same moment and manner in the translated text. The translation becomes Murillo Fort’s idiomatic Spanish, while at the same time McCarthy’s idiomatic American English imposes its presence and exerts a Schleiermacher-Steiner-Venuti foreignizing, restitutive or remainder pressure on the SLT.<sup>23</sup>

## **6. Recasting Slang: “chipped,” “honey,” “ball park,” “busted out,” “the dozens,” “third railers,” and “trick bag”**

The convincing recasting of slang<sup>24</sup> requires an excellent eye and ear, the ability to visualize and hear the colloquial orality of the words in a particular SLT discourse domain, e.g., that of the ex-con Black, and to strabismally and tonally *do* the same (re-see and re-hear it) in its cross-cultural re-localization to the TLT. More than simply a word or phrase, the unit of translation for slang is the look, sound and feel of the manner of the utterance, described by Murillo Fort as follows: “The BIG question for me is, okay, you found the equivalent for a word or phrase. Now, does it have the same cultural, semantic weight as the original word or phrase has or is intended to have?” (2007b: 8). Murillo Fort must make it possible for the TLT reader or spectator to re-visualize and at least intuit voice, a cross-cultural echo of the original SLT idiom and its nuances, in Cormac McCarthy’s *The Sunset Limited* in Spanish. It reflects a creative process of listening to and then hearing what has been seen (the writing), and then conveying via a re-writing (a re-seeing) what was first heard in another language: see →

listen → hear → re-see and convey. To hear the voices of the SLT in the translation, the reader of a translation also must collaborate and read imaginatively; he or she must play along and participate actively in the compensation processes of the translated text by imagining the multimodal *sound* of the SLT at work *in* the TLT.

In his 8/28/11 email to me, Murillo Fort had requested “some help with this ghost sentence on page 14. I’m at a loss there.” Such honesty and humility is an admirable quality in an established and highly accomplished translator. Meaning is often elusive in McCarthy’s literature, which heightens the enjoyment of the reading, and the anxiety of the translating. An appeal for assistance may not deliver what is needed. Two semantic difficulties were being referenced: the lexeme “chipped” followed by the image of “Running blindfold through the woods with the bit tween your teeth.” The fuller analytical context is the following:

Black [...] If it aint got the lingerin scent of divinity to it then I aint interested.  
 White The lingering scent of divinity.  
 Black Yeah. You like that?  
 White It’s not bad.  
 Black I heard it on the radio. Black preacher. But the point is I done tried it the other way. And I dont mean chipped, neither. Runnin blindfold through the woods with the bit tween your teeth. Oh man. Didn’t I try it though. If you can find a soul that give it a better shot than me I’d like to meet him. I surely would. (p.14)

Murillo Fort’s 8/29/11 translation-in-progress was:

Black [...] Lo que no tenga el persistente aroma de la divinidad no me interesa.  
 White El persistente aroma de la divinidad.  
 Black Sí. ¿Qué, le ha gustado?  
 White No está mal.  
 Black Se lo oí un día por la radio a un predicador negro. El caso es que yo lo probé pero por la otra vía. Y no me estoy refiriendo a ir con fulanas y tal.<sup>14</sup> [Murillo Fort’s indication of doubt by page number of the edition he was translating from]. Madre mía. Pero vaya si no lo intenté. Si encuentra a alguien que haya puesto más empeño que yo, me lo presenta. Caso de que lo encuentre. (p. 10)

His rendition of “Yeah. You like that?” as “Sí. ¿Qué, le ha gustado? [Yeah. What, you like that?]” is very effective in conveying some sense of the original idiom and tone via the simple addition of “¿Qué,” as is his recasting of “I surely would” into the marvelously idiomatic “Caso de que lo encuentre” [in the event/in case you/I run across him]. I initially suggested that the lexeme “chipped,” while plausible as promiscuous women and the like (“fulanas y tal”), might work better as “halfheartedly” or ‘half way’, as in “a medias. It might make more sense if you consider it as to chip



away at something, meaning to do it bit by bit, little by little. This would certainly fit with the context” of Black having tried to live a life of wantonness “the other way”—without the moderation provided by Jesus in it—, to excess rather than half-heartedly (8/29/11 marginal note). Murillo Fort concurred, responding that he “had found this sense [of promiscuous woman] after many searches and thought it might fit. But this other sense makes more sense” (8/29/11 marginal note). I followed up on this again several weeks later (9/22/11 emails):

More on ‘chippy’: to chip is also slang for ‘to take a narcotic drug occasionally, esp. only in sufficient quantity to achieve a mild euphoria.’<sup>25</sup> So it still makes sense for it to mean that Black did not do things half way or half-heartedly. He went at life full bore. Perhaps the best rendition would be along the lines of ‘And I dont mean just half drugged/half high/half stoned’ = ‘medio arrebatado/ahumado’ or something similar? This would capture the sense of not just doing things half way, and it would insert a bit of the drug world into Black’s past life, as occurs with alcohol later in the novel with his allusions to drinking. This would certainly fit with being an ex con.

Murillo Fort concurred: “I’ll follow your last ‘medio drogado’ [half-drugged/half-stoned/half-high] lead: ‘Y no crea que fueron cuatro canutos de nada, no.’” I responded that, “[Y]our slang solution of ‘Y no crea ...’ seems perfect!” (9/27/11 emails).

In his 8/29/11 marginal note, however, Murillo Fort had forewarned that “the real problem was the sentence after [the one with “chipped”]: Running blindfold ...” I responded with:

This is more explanation than translation, just to try to help: ‘Y no quiero decir que a medias. A galope por el bosque con los ojos vendados y sin bocado, estaba que no me paraba nadie. Madre mía. Pero vaya si no lo intenté.’ [Doyle self translation: And I don’t mean half way. Galloping blindfolded through the woods with no bit between your teeth, nobody could stop me. Sweet Mother of Jesus! But didn’t I try it!] Luis, I have consulted at length with my colleague Dr. Ron Lunsford, Professor of English<sup>26</sup>, and he thinks this is the right sense for it. That Black had tried life the other way, without the lingering scent of divinity, and had gone hog wild (había tirado la casa por la ventana) before finding religion. Does this make sense to you? ‘Madre mía’ captures all the force of this notion of going on a wild rampage, nobody else having control over the bit in our mouths ... Do you think you need to query Gary F.<sup>27</sup>, CM’s agent about this one? I think we have the correct meaning but ...

In the end, the more precise way to interpret “Running blindfold through the woods with the bit tween your teeth” is probably that Black is actually referencing his *not* having chipped drugs for half a high but instead that he indulged them to excess (no bit at all between his teeth) during that phase of his life, rather than understand it as just the opposite, his having been somewhat restrained (like a blindfolded horse with

a bit between its teeth). In short: “the other way” = not “chippied” = not restrained or half way = running wild without a controlling bit in the horse’s (Black’s) mouth. Both possibilities for interpretation—“I don’t mean chippied, neither. [I mean instead] [r]unning blindfold through the woods with the [restraining] bit tween your teeth” vs. “I don’t mean chippied, neither, [I don’t mean] [r]unning blindfold through the woods with the bit tween your teeth”—convey complete abandonment, cross-idiomatically rendered by Murillo Fort’s proposed “Y no me estoy refiriendo a medio drogado. Y no crea que fueron cuatro canutos de nada, no.” Despite the bifurcation of form in the two English wordings, an ambiguity planted by McCarthy’s use of a period vs. a comma, or a period that can also be read as a comma, the essential meaning remains stable. We will have to wait to see Murillo Fort’s final solution to the formal punctuation-semantic issue.

Other examples of the difficulties of recasting slang derive from culturally-charged lexemes such as “honey” (p.13), “ball park” (p.15), “busted out” (p.27), “the dozens” (p.72), “third railers” (p.128) and “trick bag” (p.128). Black calls White “honey” several times: “I know you dont, honey” (p.13), “Of course you do, honey” (p.61), and “Honey, I swear I aint” (p.70). White reacts defensively, “[W]hy do you keep calling me honey” (p. 70), as the word is generally a term of endearment for a child or a member of the opposite sex (as in the Cajun *chère*, *sweetie*, *honey pie*). Black, harking back to his Louisiana roots, clarifies that the reason is cultural:

- Black     That’s just the old south talkin. They aint nothing wrong with it. I’ll try and quit if it bothers you.  
 White     I’m just not sure what it means.  
 Black     It means you among friends. It means quit worryin bout everthing. (pp.70-71)

In effect, it is a dialectal synonym for the more universal “buddy.” Yet, as an even stronger, deep-south term of endearment, it is rather unusual which is why it also calls the reader’s attention in American English. Murillo Fort must strive to find a word in Spanish that can work in a similar way, one that is used idiomatically yet remains a bit odd (due to dialect, if at all possible). He does so effectively within Peninsular Spanish when he informs me that “I think ‘criatura’ [creature, critter<sup>28</sup>] will do the job” (8/16/11 email).

The slang “ball park” (p.15) derives culturally from American baseball. It means an approximate or general estimate, one that is reasonable or feasible within a figurative field of play or consideration, as when Black interrogates White about the number of books he has read:

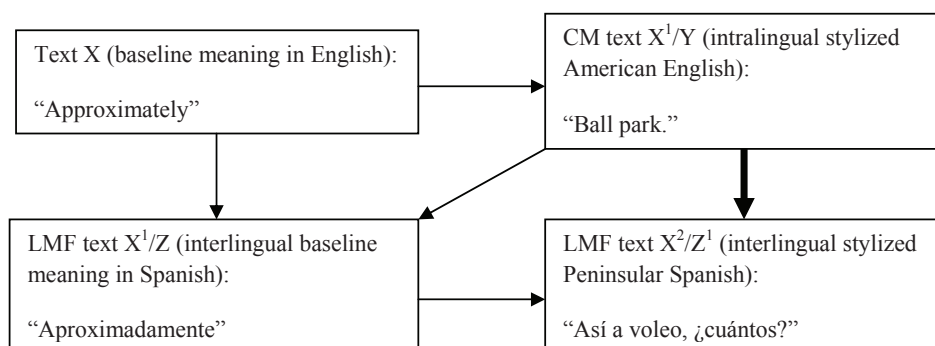
- Black     But you is read a lot of books.  
 White     Yes.  
 Black     How many would you say you read?  
 White     I’ve no idea.  
 Black     Ball park. (p.15)

In his 8/29/11 draft, Murillo Fort translated this as follows:

Black Pero ha leído la tira ["la tira" is an excellent rendition of informal register] de libros.  
 White Sí.  
 Black ¿Cuántos calcula usted?  
 White No sabría decirle.  
 Black Aproximadamente, hombre.

Here "ball park" has been reduced to "approximately," which led me to ask, "Is there another way, using a sports analogy like the one from baseball, to say this? Something with soccer, perhaps?" Murillo Fort, having anticipated my query, responded that "I already changed that with 'Así a voleo, ¿cuántos?'" a wonderfully slangy solution that means "at random/if you had to guess" and still retains at its core something of the SLT sports context [*volear* = to volley → volley/pass your guesstimate back to me]. A process diagram (Figure 2) maps the transformative movement occurring in the translation:

Figure 2. A process diagram mapping the transformative movement of difference in sameness/ sameness in difference from baseline to stylized expression in Cormac McCarthy's (CM) American English and Murillo Fort's (MF) Peninsular Spanish texts.



The phrase "busted out" appears in the following brief exchange:

Black So let me see if I got this straight. You sayin that all this culture stuff is all they ever was tween you and the Sunset Limited.  
 White It's a lot.  
 Black But it busted out on you.  
 White Yes. (p. 27)

Murillo Fort translated it as follows (see Figure 3), reproduced with his doubt indicated in boldface and our biopsy dialogue in the marginal notes (8/29/11 draft):

Figure 3. Sample of Murillo Fort's translation-in-progress, with threaded commentary by translator and shadower

Black Ya. A ver si lo he entendido. Me está diciendo que entre usted y el Sunset Limited lo único que hay es todas esas cosas de la cultura.

White Es mucho, creo yo.

Black Pero le reventó en las manos/?

**Comment [EU1]:** Luis, I read this as something like "left you behind or failed you, left you high and dry" (like a jailbreak, those who bust out leave others behind). The sense of busted as broken is there, as you have it. But I read it more as "got away from you."

**Comment [2R1]:** Then maybe "se le fue de las manos" will be the 'best' solution.

At the time of this writing, then, one anticipates that the published translation of "bustin out" will read as a cross-idiomatic "se le fue de las manos" [left your hands → got away from you, let you down].

The "dozens" (72) is another example of Black's idio-dialect, in this instance more closely related to non-geographic cultural banter between two American black men than to Black's Louisiana background, and to how McCarthy interlingually incorporates translation (*qua* explication) into his own SLT<sup>29</sup>. Black accuses White of being a defeatist because whenever Black pressures him to justify himself, White responds with a threat to leave:

White I have to go.

Black Ever time the dozens gets a little heavy you got to go.

White What's the dozens?

Black It's when two of the brothers stands around insultin one another and the first one gets pissed off loses.<sup>30</sup>

White What's the point of it?

Black Winnin and losin is the point of it. Same as the point of everthing else.

White And you win by making the other guy angry.

Black That's correct.

White I dont get it.

Black You aint supposed to get it. You white. (pp. 72-73)

Black, representing an African-American linguistic minority, must intralingually translate his slang so that White, emblematic of the Caucasian linguistic majority, can understand him in their provisional *lingua franca*, American English. Echoing the linguistic outsider White, Murillo Fort must convey *what* Black is saying (the translation tenet of never traducing meaning), but then he must also "slang" his Spanishing of the SLT, which he does commendably with "rosquillas" ("Don't ask me where but I found this 'rosquillas' thing to be an almost exact version of the dozens," 8/29/11 marginal note), embedded within his very fine overall translation of the exchange:

- White Tengo que irme.  
 Black Cada vez que las rosquillas se ponen un poco feas le entran ganas de marcharse.  
 White ¿De qué rosquillas me habla?  
 Black Bah, ni siquiera es eso. No es más que una pequeña discusión.  
 White Sigo sin entender.  
 Black Lo llamamos jugar a las rosquillas cuando dos hermanos se plantan el uno delante del otro y se lían a intercambiar insultos. El primero que se cabrea, pierde.  
 White ¿Y qué sentido tiene?  
 Black Ganar o perder. El mismo sentido que tiene todo lo demás.  
 White Ah. Y gana quien consigue que el contrincante se enfade.  
 Black Correcto.  
 White Pues no lo entiendo.  
 Black Ni tiene por qué, amigo [an excellent cross-idiomatic rendition]. Usté es *blanco*.

The culturally-charged, slang lexemes “third railers” and “trick bag” can be considered in tandem, as the fact that White is not a typical “third railer” constitutes the core of the “trick bag” in which Black ultimately finds himself:

- Black I think that anybody in your position is automatically blind. But that aint the whole story. Because we still talking bout the rest of them third railers and them takin one train and you takin another.  
 White I didn't say that.  
 Black Sure you did. They got a train for all them dumb-ass crackers that just feels bad and then they got this other train for you cause your pain and the world's pain is the same pain and this train requires a observation car and a diner.  
 White Well. You can think what you want. You dont need my agreement.  
 Black I know. But that aint the way to the trick bag.  
 White Well. The trick bag seems to have shaped itself up into some sort of communal misery wherein one finds salvation by consorting among the loathsome.  
 Black Damn, Professor. You putting me in the bag. Where you come up with stuff like that? (pp.127-128)

The “third railer” railroad slang image refers us to Black's admonition that White should “Buy the right ticket. Take that regular commuter train and stay off the express” (133). A “third railer,” then, in this context is a passenger who is riding separately from others, in a “third rail” train. “Third rail,” technically “a rail laid parallel and adjacent to the running rails of an electrified railroad to provide electric current to the motors of a car or locomotive through contact shoes,” can also be used figuratively to reference “a third rail issue,” a topic that is dangerous and risky to support or comment on, such as the topic of the conversation between Black and White.<sup>31</sup> In a marginal note about how the meaning of “third railer” might be translated most appropriately, I shared with Murillo Fort that

I read it as difficult cases, challenging cases, angry people: ‘casos duros’ or ‘personajes,’ both of which you have used before. The professor is also a ‘third railer,’ but some ‘third railers’ take the sunset or suicide train while others don’t (they find a different way forward or different way out). (8/29/11)

Murillo Fort responded that he “didn’t use ‘caso duro’ because it’s not Spanish. But I get your point. I think I could use ‘tíos conflictivos’ here” (8/29/11 marginal note). The challenge remains that of possibly finding a word or phrase in Spanish that will contain the notions of: 1) a distraught traveler, and 2) aboard a different kind of train running down a parallel yet different track of life and death. “Tíos conflictivos” [tortured souls] goes only half way in this regard. Here, in a different context, we again have sameness in difference: a train like any other but at the same time different from all others,  $X^1=X^2=Y$ , is in operation. Indicating his reservations in boldface, Murillo Fort was in the process of translating the passage as follows, with very felicitous cross-idiomatic renditions of “dumb-ass crackers” as “blancuchos tontos del culo”; of “this train requires a observation car and a diner” as “ese tren tiene que tener coche panorámico y vagón restaurante”; and of “Where you come up with stuff like that?” as “¿De dónde saca esas paridas?” (8/29/11 draft):

- Black Yo sólo pienso que cualquiera en su situación deja de entenderlo a automáticamente todo. Pero hay más. Porque aquí seguimos hablando de que los otros casos duros [→tíos conflictivos] suben a un tren y usted a uno diferente.
- White Yo no he dicho tal cosa.
- Black ¿Que no? Hay un tren para todos esos blancuchos tontos del culo que sólo se sienten mal y luego hay un tren especial para usted porque resulta que su dolor y el del mundo son el mismo dolor y ese tren tiene que tener coche panorámico y vagón restaurante.
- White Bueno, piense lo que quiera. No necesita que yo esté de acuerdo.
- Black Ya, **pero no es la manera de poner a alguien en un brete.**
- White **Bien, parece que el famoso brete** ha adoptado la forma de una suerte de desdicha comunitaria donde la salvación consiste en confraternizar con los que aborrece.
- Black Caray, profesor. **Ahora sí que me pone en un brete a mí.** ¿De dónde saca esas paridas?

The “trick bag” or pinch/awkward situation to which Black alludes is translated initially as “poner a alguien en un brete,” as clarified by Murillo Fort in his 8/21/11 email: “Only yesterday I decided to use ‘poner en un brete’ as an approximate translation of ‘to put in the trick bag.’ I think it works—to the extent things work in some translations, that is.” Moreover, in an 8/29/11 email he shared a translator’s “Eureka!” moment at having found the exact word that was being sought for some of the contexts: “Now, listen. I just found another way to the infamous ‘trick bag.’ I changed the ‘brete’ thing

to 'poner chinitas en el zapato.' It fits better than 'poner en un brete.' And 'chinitas' sounds great in Black's voice, I think." Nonetheless, this solution of "chinitas" may not apply in every instance when "trick bag" appears, as "brete" seems to work better in examples such as "You think I'm fixin to put you in the trick bag" (p.43), "Se cree que quiero ponerle en un brete" (p. 31 of 8/29/11 draft) or "And then put me in the what was it? The trick bag?" (p.50), "Ponerme en qué fue lo que me dijo, ¿en un brete?" (p.37 of 8/29/11 draft). At one point, in search of solutions, I had even suggested that "Maybe you could use a literal translation for 'trick bag,' explain it the first time it appears (*ponerle en un brete*), then simply use the literal 'saco de trucos' from then on?," to which Murillo Fort responded, "I did think about that, but it sounds really weird in Spanish" (p. 90 of 8/29/11 draft). Again, the peculiarities of McCarthy's writing in American English, that SLT weirdness itself, must be tempered by the culturally feasible cross-linguistic possibilities and translation poetics at work in this particular case in Spanish. Here, Murillo Fort is guarding against his translation sounding too strange to his own ear and to that of his editor and publisher.

Although the analytical focus has been on selected examples of difficulty in translating *The Sunset Limited*, the fact that Murillo Fort consistently excels in recasting McCarthy's slang and figurative language into that of Peninsular Spanish must be applauded. To work as slang, a piece of writing must have the look and sound of slang, and it must also have the feel of slang. In sum, it must have cultural credibility (*cultural cred*), which means that it must be authentically localized. In the examples highlighted below, Murillo Fort accomplishes all of these requirements in re-situating the American English into Peninsular Spanish (8-29-11 translation draft-in-progress). Of course, were he from elsewhere in the Spanish-speaking world—Andalusian, Puerto Rican, Colombian, or Argentine, etc.—the slang renditions would vary considerably.

Table 1. Slang renditions in Murillo Fort's Translation Draft-in-progress.

Black	So what are we sayin here? You lookin at some big black angel got sent down here to grab your honky ass out of the air at the last possible minute and save you from destruction? (p.23)	Bien. Entonces ¿qué? ¿Soy una especie de ángel negro grandullón que ha bajao del cielo pa' agarrar del culo a un blanco in extremis y así salvarlo de la destrucción? (p.17)
White	Have you ever been married?	White ¿Ha estado casado?
Black	Married.	Black Casado...
White	Yes.	White Sí.
Black	( <i>Softly</i> ) Oh man. (p.37)	Black ( <i>En voz baja</i> ) Lo que faltaba. (p.26)
Black	You had brothers in there that had done some real bad shit and they wasn't sorry. (p.41)	Allí dentro había hermanos que habían hecho cosas muy gordas y les importaba todo una higa. (pp.29-30)
Black:	What, are you shittin me? (p.43)	Oiga, ¿se está cachondeando de mí o qué? (p.31)
Black	I come pretty close to dyin. (pp.48-49)	Por poco no lo cuento. (p.35-36)

(Cont.)

Black	But I thought I was in charge. (p.53)	[P]ero creía tener la sartén por el mango. (p.38)
White	God help us. (p.54)	Santo cielo. (p.39)
Black	You a hard case, Professor.	Black Es usted lo que no hay, profesor.
White	You're not exactly a day at the beach yourself. (p.59)	White Usted tampoco se queda manco. (p.43)
White	... to me the whole idea of God is just a load of crap. (p.62)	... a mi la idea de Dios me parece una chuminada [Murillo Fort clarifies this in his marginal note as "right from 'the street dictionary'"] (p.46)
White	I'm not buying it. (p.66)	No me lo trago. (p.49)
Black	What about them other folks tryin to off themselves (p.81)	¿Qué me dice de la otra gente que intenta darse el finiquito? (p.59)
Black	The simplest things has got more to em than you can ever understand (p.86)	[L]as cosas más sencillas tienen mucha más miga de lo que pensamos (p.64)
White	under your breath. (p.88)	por lo bajini. (p.66)
White	Pulling your chain (p.94)	Me estaba quedando con usted [Murillo Fort clarifies this in his marginal note as "street jargon, probably from the eighties"] (p.70)
Black	You like that?	¿Le gusta?
White	It's okay. (p.108)	Regular.(p.80)
Black	Man. (p.122)	Tío. (p. 91)
White	Is your life the one you'd planned?	White ¿Su vida es como usted la había previsto?
Black	No, it aint. (p.124)	Black Nones. (p.92)

Although McCarthy's writing of Black's idio-dialect—its ungrammaticality, substandard orthography, and syntactical deviations, for example—cannot be reproduced consistently or the same way in Spanish, Murillo Fort's deft accumulated compensations, such as the successful renditions of the slang details in Table 1 above, bode well for an excellent overall read to come.

## 7. Firsthand Confirmations on How Best to Translate

This article shares a biopsy on the *process* of a translation, rather than an autopsy on its finished *product*. We confirm first hand, thereby, from a bioptic shadowing of the work-in-progress by highly accomplished translator Luis Murillo Fort, that:

- Translating is highly dynamic and fluid—provisional—in its search for cross-cultural linguistic and cultural renditions.
- Translation requires obsessive and sustained focus.
- Translation is an endeavor fraught with ceaseless second-guessing.
- Translation requires honesty and humility on the part of the translator who must acknowledge being stumped by a word, phrase or other translation unit.



- Translation requires indefatigable research in order to ensure the transfer of meaning and not traduce the SLT.
- A translator must obsessively sweat the details.
- Eureka moments—"Aha, I've found just the right word or way to say it!"—are what a translator seeks and remembers.
- The *sound*, *look* and *feel* of the language of the translation is crucial, especially when dealing with slang.
- A translator must listen to the acoustics of language and for the harmonics between SLT and TLT.
- A translator must have (or develop) an "ear" for slang in order to translate it effectively (convincingly).
- Together with securing meaning (the *what* of the story being told), a translator must always focus on manner (the *how* or the telling of the story).
- A translator must follow intuition regarding how best to translate something.
- A balance must be struck between foreignizing and domesticating a SLT in translation; both are present in the final product of dialectal literature in translation, and both can occur simultaneously.
- Non translation is at times the best translation of a word, interjection or phrase.
- A translation project depends on more than just the work of the translator. Gatekeepers—editors and publishers—also have a key role in shaping the final product.
- To translate counter to a prevailing national or publisher's poetics of literary translation expectations is a difficult and precarious undertaking.
- Dialect thwarts translation.
- Translation "can only be achieved to an approximate measure" (*Ortega y Gasset*)<sup>32</sup>. That is all we can expect and that is enough. However, this does not prevent excellence or Ortega's occasional "splendor" in translation, which comes in myriad guises.
- The movement from source to target language texts is a transformative process of creating difference in sameness while maintaining sameness in difference.
- To excel, a translator must have very high standards and seldom be satisfied with a rendition.
- To excel, a translator, even an accomplished one, must be committed to continuous improvement.

## 8. Conclusion: a Striving for Imperfect Perfection

Once again, we are reminded that a good literary translation, what Leonardo Bruni called "a great and difficult thing" (Lefevere 1992: 83), is more or less, and more *and* less, the same as the SLT from which it comes. It is a striving for imperfect perfection, knowing that striking the perfect word or turn of a phrase is inevitably

marked by the imperfection of difference. Perfection as sameness is unattainable. Such are its limitations and possibilities, and we should not ask that literary translation be more than what it is and can be, even at the highest levels of its practice.<sup>33</sup> McCarthy's words in *The Sunset Limited* define the mindset with which a reader must always approach a translation: "You can acclimate yourself to loss. You have to" (p.130). As the translator himself reminds us, "Many things get lost when translating him [Cormac McCarthy], yet I think there's probably nothing you can do about it. It's the price you have to pay for not reading the book as it was written." Taking McCarthy's literary worlds into another language can be achieved successfully, "as long as you accept that translation implies some shifting from the original text" (2007b: 8). Despite these caveats, Cormac McCarthy's novel in dramatic form renews itself artfully in the Spanish of Luis Murillo Fort as translation's definitional sameness in difference and difference in sameness prevail at the highest levels of praxis. A postmortem coda now awaits.

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<sup>1</sup>English rendition by Elizabeth Gamble Miller: "[To free men from the divisions imposed by languages] can only be achieved to an approximate measure." i.e., "[Translation] can only be achieved to an approximate measure" (pp.98-99).

<sup>2</sup>See Doyle in Works Cited.

<sup>3</sup>In terms of translation theory, strategy and method, when I asked Murillo Fort "Is there a theory of translation, or a strategy and set of tactics, that underlie your work?," he responded "No strategies at all. I can only trust my intuition, and my knowledge of the Spanish language. I try to sort out things step by step, then go through my text many times" ("An Interview," p.6). In a second interview on completely different McCarthy translations and aspects of his craft, Murillo Fort further clarified that: "Mi *approach*... es poco metodológico. Soy un traductor muy intuitivo... el método sigue siendo más o menos el de siempre, que es lanzarme de cabeza, zambullirme como si no supiera si el agua va a estar fría o no, y a ver qué pasa. Unas veces funciona muy bien y todo sale rodado, y otras veces hay muchos obstáculos y resulta que además de agua había piedras, y te das de cabeza ahí, y duele. Reconozco que no es una manera de enfocar nada científica, más bien experimental." ("Una entrevista," p.185)

<sup>4</sup>The impressive range of novelists Murillo Fort has translated includes Dashiell Hammett, Barry Gifford, Richard Russo, John LeCarré, Anne Rice, Jean Sasson, Nicholson Baker, Kelly Jones, Philip Pullman, James Carlos Blake, Mary Higgins Clark, Nicholas Evans, Danielle Steel, Richard Yates, Jonathan Franzen, Deborah Eisenberg, James Salter, Evelyn Waugh, David Vann, Carsten Stroud, and Cormac McCarthy, among others.

<sup>5</sup>It is very different from the pedagogical synchronous vantage point of an instructor who shadows and guides students through the translation process in order to provide corrections, methodological feedback, and assessment. In this case, it involved communicating with an accomplished professional translator in order to learn more about how translation is done at the highest levels.

<sup>6</sup>In my 8/31/11 email I asked Murillo Fort "How has *Sunset* been different from your previous translations of CM? Since you have translated many of his books, are you doing or trying different things now when you work on CM? How are you dealing with the issue of dialect in CM now?" He responded as follows:

"Well, the fact that it's mostly dialogue has been a change in itself. Harder? Easier? Hard to tell. Not only a new book is a new challenge for the translator, I'm not exactly the same person, either. Hopefully I can do my job better than before. Trying new things, yes (as you know). I was committed to myself to improve my rendition of CM's characters' speech. In a way I've been bolder this time. And I'm grateful to you, Mr. Doyle, who didn't avoid telling me what I could have done better in previous translations."

<sup>7</sup>Regarding this type of visualization on the part of a writer or translator, Murillo Fort had said in "Una entrevista" that "Supongo que un autor, cuando crea un determinado personaje, puede tener una cara en mente, pero puede muy bien no tenerla, porque claro, al fin y al cabo estamos hablando de letra escrita. Pero es probable que cuando uno escribe una novela simplemente por escribir esa novela, sin pensar en un guión de cine, difícilmente tenga una idea muy clara de qué rostro asigna a tal o cual personaje. Volviendo a *No Country for Old Men*, yo juraría que en ningún momento hay una descripción del asesino Chigurh con el peinado que luce Bardem en la película. Entonces es una licencia poética de los Coen, cosa que me parece bien porque, y vuelvo una vez más a lo de antes, cada lector es único, ellos se imaginaron a este tío con ese peinado, ¿no?" (p.184)

<sup>8</sup>Doyle translation from the Spanish: "Según lo que yo recibo, o creo recibir, del autor, actúo en consecuencia" (182).

<sup>9</sup>For more on the complexity of titles in translation, see Doyle's "Contemporary Spanish and Spanish American Fiction in English: Tropes of Fidelity in the Translation of Titles."

<sup>10</sup>High-speed, high-comfort Spanish train that was a predecessor to the faster, more modern AVE.

<sup>11</sup>"Southern Crescent," [http://www.clemsonwiki.com/wiki/Southern\\_Crescent](http://www.clemsonwiki.com/wiki/Southern_Crescent) [Consulted 2 November 2011].

<sup>12</sup>A graphic representation of this phenomenon is provided in Doyle, "A whole new style seemed to be seeking expression here': Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* in Spanish," p.10.

<sup>13</sup>He also benefits from the fact that he is very well read and is a cinema aficionado.

<sup>14</sup>Including *The Sunset Limited*, currently in press with Random House Mondadori, Barcelona, Murillo Fort has translated nine of McCarthy's eleven novels: *The Crossing* (*En la frontera*, 1999); *The Orchard Keeper* (*El guardián del vergel*, 2000); *Blood Meridian* (*Meridiano de sangre*, 2001); *Cities of the Plain* (*Ciudades de la llanura*, 2002); *Outer Dark* (*La oscuridad exterior*, 2002); *Suttree* (*Suttree*, 2004); *No Country for Old Men* (*No es país para viejos*, 2006); and *The Road* (*La carretera*, 2007). See Bibliography for full information.

<sup>15</sup>An analogous way to see or hear idiolect as a peculiarity is to consider Picasso's unique version of Velazquez's *Las Meninas* or Jimi Hendrix's Woodstock version of *The Star Spangled Banner*.

<sup>16</sup>See Doyle for more on the challenges, and ultimate impossibility, of translating McCarthy's literary dialects: "A whole new style seemed to be seeking expression here': Cormac McCarthy's *Outer Dark* in Spanish" and "Five Translators Translating: Reading *Blood Meridian* from English into English, Spanish into English, and English into Spanish".

<sup>17</sup>Soto Vázquez has written in *Novela regional y sus traducciones al español* that the translation of dialect encounters "una fuerte resistencia en la cultura meta o rozará la utopía, y ante esos retos sólo la competencia lingüística del traductor, su conocimiento de ambas culturas y una sensibilidad exquisita podrá ofrecer resultados razonablemente dignos" (p.5). Further, "el trasvase de la diversidad lingüística y cultural que se ha ido atesorando en este tejido discursivo literario [de la expresión dialectal] constituye uno de los retos más seductores para traductores y traductólogos" (p.7).

<sup>18</sup>The black characters in McCarthy's masterpiece novel *Suttree* are from east Tennessee, specifically Knoxville. Their diction and dialect are small-city southern and east-Tennessean rather than predominantly east-coast New York City. For more on the challenges of translating idio-dialect in *Suttree*, see Doyle ("Missing in Portuguese: Prolegomenon to a Translation of Cormac McCarthy's *Suttree*").

<sup>19</sup>See Doyle interviews with Murillo Fort; for example, observations such as “English is such a synthetic language, much easier to coin new words in than Spanish. I did try to match the ‘weirdness’ [of McCarthy’s language] when it slapped me in the face” (“An Interview,” p.7).

<sup>20</sup>Ortega in Spanish that: “cada lengua es una ecuación diferente entre manifestaciones y silencios.” Furthermore, “al hablar o escribir *renunciamos* a decir muchas cosas porque la lengua no nos lo permite” (p.443), and “el habla se compone sobre todo de silencios... Cada pueblo calla unas cosas *para* poder decir otras... De aquí la enorme dificultad de la traducción: en ella se trata de decir en un idioma precisamente lo que este idioma tiende a silenciar” (p.444). This forms part of Ortega’s hermeneutics of silence, “in which the there exists what cannot be said in any language, ‘lo inefable’(...) accompanied by what could be expressed but which each individual language silences because it is considered implicit, ‘lo inefado’” (Ordóñez-López, 2006: 56). See also Ortega y Gasset’s “Comentario al ‘Banquete’ de Platón,” in *Obras completas*, vol. 9, 756, Alianza Editorial/ Revista de Occidente, Madrid.

<sup>21</sup>In an 11/15/11 email, Murillo Fort wrote that: “I’m still waiting for the second galley proof to arrive. All in all, I think my translation will work, even if I would have kept some ‘edge’ to it, some much needed *uncorrection*. I was informed that the editors didn’t like it [my wanting to retain more of the ‘edge’ of McCarthy’s idio-dialectal *uncorrection*]. Too much effort required from the average Spanish reader? I don’t know. I was required to modify all the rough edges... . Much as I knew I would, and after setting out my case, I surrendered.”

<sup>22</sup>In *Thinking Spanish Translation*, Hervey et al. wrestle with the challenge of dialect and conclude that: “The safest decision may after all be to make relatively sparing use of TL [target language] features that are recognizably dialectal without being clearly recognizable as belonging to a specific dialect ... [I]t would be even safer, with a dialect containing direct speech, to translate dialogue into fairly neutral English, and, if necessary, to add after an appropriate piece of direct speech some such phrase as ‘she said, in a broad Andalusian accent’” (p.113). In “La traducción de dialectalismos en los textos literarios,” Belén Hernández has written that: “Cuando el texto literario proviene de una lengua dialectal, se dice que la traducción es el mayor imposible... Las técnicas consentidas hoy para reproducir los dialectalismos en la lengua de llegada rechazan la sustitución de un dialecto por otro, aunque éste pueda representar una variedad lingüística paralela en la segunda lengua. Tampoco es satisfactorio acortar las palabras al final, con el objetivo de subrayar que se trata de un habla de campesino ignorante, por ejemplo. Es más adecuado producir un lenguaje jergal natural, para hacer entender que se trata de un dialectalismo, y re-procesar solamente una parte de las palabras del original, justamente las necesarias para hacer entender la función asignada al dialecto.” Hernández concludes that “el traductor está obligado a seguir las mismas estrategias que ponen en relieve las divergencias con respecto a la lengua estándar, ya sean estas de contraste o de mezcla de variantes lingüísticas. El contenido cultural será por tanto el valor fundamental que el traductor debe trasvasar en la lengua de llegada.” The “cultural content” she refers to, however, is precisely what cannot be adequately relocated from one language and culture into another, different, language and culture. Well known American literary translators Gregory Rabassa, Clifford Landers, and Pamela Carmell differ on the matter. Rabassa has written that “The transfer of local or regional idiom into another language... must be listed as another of the impossibilities of translation” (24). Landers concurs when he writes that “No dialect travels well in translation... The best advice about trying to translate dialect: don’t” (117). Carmell, on the other hand, commented to me at the 2007 annual conference of the American Literary Translators Association (ALTA) that to not do anything dialectal with the translation of dialect “is a cop-out” (American Literary Translators Association 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference, “Celebrating the Past/Imagining the Future,” University of Texas at Dallas, November 7-10, 2007).

<sup>23</sup>Schleiermacher’s methodological term for this SLT pressure on the TLT is “foreignization”; Steiner’s hermeneutico-methodological term for it is “restitution”; and Venuti’s extension of both of these is “remainder.”

<sup>24</sup>Although theorists, translators, instructors, scholars and critics (e.g., ranging from Hervey, et al., Baker, Landers, Munday, Rabassa, and Soto Vázquez to Washbourne) have written considerably about the translation

of dialect, register and figurative language in literary translation, relatively little has been written about the relocalization of slang from the American South *per se*.

<sup>25</sup> *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (Second Edition Unabridged).

<sup>26</sup> Dr. Ronald Lunsford, a native of North Carolina, is a distinguished professor of linguistics and composition in the English Department at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. I often consult him on matters related to southern dialect and semantics.

<sup>27</sup> I suggested this possibility because in the past Murillo Fort had sought assistance from McCarthy's editor, Gary Fisketjon, "who has been helpful and provides his own answers to my queries. Other times he sends my list to McCarthy, then e-mails me with a reply" ("An Interview," 4).

<sup>28</sup> In the American South "critter" ["criatura"] may be used as a term of endearment for a child.

<sup>29</sup> McCarthy's incorporation of translation into his fiction writing is examined in the article "Five Translators Translating": he "frequently provides his own intra- (Englishing the English) as well as interlingual translations (Englishing the Spanish and vice versa), a within-the-narrative glossing of sorts that illustrates various tactics of literary translation such as compensation, explication, and interpolation" (36).

<sup>30</sup> On p. 74 White requests further explanation: "Why is it called the dozens? (...) What sorts of insults?" Black responds that: "Oh, you might say something about the other man's mama. That's a sensitive area, you might say. And he might lose it and come after your ass but when he done that it's like he's sayin that what you just got done tellin about his mama was true. It's like he sayin: You aint supposed to know that about my mama and you damn sure aint supposed to of told it and now I'm fixin to whip your ass."

<sup>31</sup> Sources: "third rail". Dictionary.com Unabridged. Random House, Inc. 08 Nov. 2011. <Dictionary.com [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/third rail](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/third+rail)> and "third rail." Collins English Dictionary - Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition. HarperCollins Publishers. 08 Nov. 2011. <Dictionary.com [http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/third rail](http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/third+rail)>.

<sup>32</sup> In *Experiences in Translation*, renowned Italian semiotician, thinker, theorist, and novelist Umberto Eco also addresses translation as an approximation.

<sup>33</sup> Ortega reminds us that "La traducción no es un doble del texto original; no es, no debe querer ser la obra misma con léxico distinto... la traducción no es la obra, sino un camino hacia la obra" (p.448).